

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
ROUTING SLIP

*Memo
choxd*

TO:

		ACTION	INFO	DATE	INITIAL
1	DCI		X		
2	DDCI		X		
3	EXDIR		X		
4	D/ICS				
5	DDI	X			
6	DDA				
7	DDO				
8	DDS&T				
9	Chm/NIC				
10	GC				
11	IG				
12	Compt				
13	D/Pers				
14	D/OLL				
15	D/PAO				
16	SA/IA				
17	AO/DCI				
18	C/IPD/OIS				
19	NI/OSP	X			
20	NI/GPF	X			
21					
22					

SUSPENSE

8 Feb 85

Date

Remarks

25X1

Executive Secretary
28 Jan 85

Date

85- 403

26 January 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Intelligence
National Intelligence Officer for Strategic Programs
National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces

FROM: Director of Central Intelligence


SUBJECT: Net Assessments

1. I would like to review our posture with respect to net assessments. We produced what I thought was rather a good product a year or two ago in the way of a net assessment of Strategic Forces.

2. At that time it is my recollection that we had planned, at least tentatively, a net assessment on missile defense. What happened to that? Is it still a good idea?

3. I noted recently a reference to a net assessment which Ray Cline, then DDI, and Admiral Radford, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, did together in the 1950s. I tried to get a line on this and all I come up with are pages from Ray Cline's book on the CIA which I attach. It seems to me that in the light of the vast change in Soviet capabilities, as spelled out in our estimates on Soviet global reach and the ongoing one on Soviet capability for multitheater war, as well as our work on strategic and conventional forces and our knowledge of Soviet subversion and insurgency support capabilities, together with the forthcoming estimate on SPETSNAZ, certainly a net assessment covering the total range of Soviet-US military and paramilitary capabilities would be a formidable undertaking but would be a challenging and probably a very revealing one.

4. I would like the addressees of this note to think about it and schedule a time to discuss it.


William J. Casey

DCI
EXEC
REG

SECRET

SECRETS, SPIES AND SCHOLARS

The Essential CIA

by Ray S. Cline



AN ORACLE TRADEPAPERBACK
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a very special estimative process in which I participated during the latter part of 1954 when I was detailed to the Pentagon to assist in preparing a Net Estimate on the USSR. The several months I spent on this endeavor were extremely enlightening and, again, I am sorry that this experiment in intelligence processing ended after a few years and is imperfectly understood today. We prepared an excellent Net Estimate in 1954 and it had a marked influence on military strategy and policy—mainly because the President—Eisenhower—and his two top technical advisers in the matter, Dulles of CIA and Admiral Arthur Radford, Chairman of the JCS, enthusiastically endorsed the project and paid attention to the findings.

The concept of a net estimate is basically a military one and it had evolved into a preliminary pilot project while I was in London. It was agreed at the NSC level to go all out on the 1954 effort. The concept is that while intelligence agencies are able to gauge enemy capabilities and intentions, these are most meaningful if weighed against an estimate of U.S. forces' capabilities and intentions. This latter estimate is prepared by planning and operations staffs of the JCS. If these two analytical processes are integrated intellectually and combined in one estimate of the probable balance of potential forces and the probable outcome of conflicts, this is a "net" evaluation or what in military tradition was called a "commander's estimate." The NSC under Eisenhower, who was familiar with this terminology, asked Dulles and Radford to prepare such a commander's estimate on the probable outcome of a war between the USSR and the United States.

In characteristic Washington procedure, Dulles delegated his responsibility to General Bull of the National Estimates Board, an experienced army operations staff chief with a fine analytical mind, and Bull chose me to go to the Pentagon and actually write the paper. Radford chose a brilliant but somewhat lackadaisical representative, Rear Admiral Thomas H. Robbins, who was quite content to let his staff assistants, some able young officers who initially had not a clue as to what we were supposed to do, take their lead from me.

I discovered what power there is in a military organization very quickly; with what amounted to a free-hand mandate from both Bull and Robbins, I could invoke Admiral Radford's

authority over the military services and have things happen instantaneously. Early in planning the project, I decided we had to reduce the complex war-gaming of attack and defense forces to the then novel technique of computerized formulas. I discovered that I could preempt the time of the vast vacuum-tube computer then filling the basement of the Pentagon and I learned that the services had one really experienced war-gaming staff—outside of Washington. Consequently, I argued that we should use the computer and the war-gaming staff to make a computerized war-game for the first time part of what would then be the most ambitious Net Estimate yet written. On Friday this was cleared with Radford; on Monday the war-game experts were on hand and we went to work.

We made some interesting discoveries—among them that it was a pretty desperate move for the USSR to attack us with their substantially inferior long-range air force, that extensive U.S. radar tactical warning systems would make it impossible for surprise to be achieved in an all-out attack, and that the characteristics of defensive radar made it much more profitable to attack at low-level where “ground-clutter” returns confused the radar rather than at the high altitudes for which our bombers were designed. This last point, I believe, gave the main impetus for a revision of bombing tactics by the U.S. Air Force and helped it ready our aircraft and future aircraft design well in advance of the time when really effective ground-to-air Soviet missiles made it imperative for the United States to go to low-level attack.

With the war-game results and all of the latest NIE detailed estimates of Soviet capabilities at my fingertips, I wrote every word of that year's Net Estimate, cleared it with everybody, and prepared the text for an oral briefing on the findings, complete with visual aid charts, which Admiral Robbins presented at the White House. Eisenhower insisted that all top officials of the Defense Department attend this special briefing. Dulles and Bull and I of course went along, the encomiums were great, and I believe we did demonstrate how useful a genuinely cooperative, interagency net estimate can be if the high command shows a real interest in it. The process was repeated for several years, without startling new findings, and the Net Estimate

system eventually lapsed, although the term lingers on in various other contexts.

This Net Estimate and the NIEs of this 1950s era succeeded in reducing the Soviet military threat to the United States to reasonable proportions in the minds of war-planning staffs. CIA probably never accomplished more of value to the nation than this quiet, little-remarked analytical feat.

It is hard to remember now that from about 1948 on, beginning with the Berlin Blockade and accelerating with the Korean War, Washington was inclined to expect a direct military assault by the Soviet Union and, later, by Communist China in Asia. Taiwan and Korea were the anticipated targets in Asia, whereas in Europe Soviet armies were expected to sweep across the North German plain to the Atlantic. The JCS in this period repeatedly estimated in their own papers that the USSR was bent on "world domination" and that the "time of greatest danger" of attack was two years hence. I believe this latter figure of speech died out about 1954.

In any case the ONE staff and Board members valiantly worked throughout the 1950s to moderate this black-and-white approach to estimates on the USSR, trying to suggest that an "ultimate" intention of "world domination" was not a sure indicator of specific near-term military action and that, on balance, the USSR would be unwise to resort to direct military attack to achieve its unquestioned purpose of increasing its political influence in Europe and the Mideast.

Most of the more moderate language describing, qualifying, and accurately quantifying the Soviet threat came from CIA draftsmen, and had to be fought through up to the DDI and DCI decision levels. It was an educational process for all concerned, as we adjusted to a postwar world of ideological, economic, political, and military conflict. Gradually military intelligence officers and civilian analysts alike became more sophisticated, the short-of-war kind of conflict became better understood, and U.S. policy became based on strategic deterrence and politico-economic alliance-building as a way of containment. My own belief is that a handful of CIA analysts and their chiefs served the country well in building this estimative foundation on which U.S. strategy and policy in its broad outlines rested for